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# ELIHU ROOT—HIS SERVICES AS SECRETARY OF WAR.

BY BRIGADIER-GENERAL WILLIAM H. CARTER, U.S.A.

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WHEN General Alger vacated the office of Secretary of War, President McKinley was confronted with a situation which was entirely new under our government; and, in order that the fruits of the brief war with Spain should not prove a detriment to the country and his administration, it was necessary that a broad-minded and eminently capable man should be found to fill the vacancy in the Cabinet. Although the reputation of Elihu Root was not confined to the great State of New York, where he stood high in the councils of his party and in the estimation of the great captains of industry and commerce, still, he was not so widely known throughout the country as were many other public men. The wide range of the legal questions which had been injected into the administration of the War Department, through the acquisition of the Philippine Islands and Porto Rico, and through the temporary wardship over Cuba, demanded the highest type of trained legal mind which could be found. That the result has proven the wisdom of President McKinley's selection is the unbiased opinion of public men of the day, and will be the undoubted verdict of history.

Secretary Root entered the War Department without any special knowledge of military affairs. Perhaps it was best for the country that this condition existed, for it induced him to apply his great mind to the study, not only of the details of military affairs, but to all the higher questions of military administration. With a vast array of questions coming daily from the insular possessions for his decision, he seized brief intervals to study all the details of our military methods. He realized that, in order to profit by our recent military lessons, it was necessary to make

a study of the entire system, since in this way only could he qualify himself to differentiate the good from the evil. He recognized that much of the complaint about the conduct of affairs in the war with Spain was ill-advised and undeserved; on the other hand, it was made perfectly apparent to him that the country had been extremely fortunate in crushing the Spanish power so easily, and that, with a better prepared enemy, the defects of our system would have been made more glaring.

Early in his career as Secretary, Mr. Root was called upon to execute that portion of a then recent Act of Congress which provided for bringing into service, for duty in the distant Philippine Islands, a body of 35,000 volunteers. He set about this task in a way that insured its accomplishment in the most efficient manner, and in the end brought him universal confidence and respect. The army knows better than the country at large the success which attended the organization of the volunteer regiments which went to the Philippines during 1899. The appointment of the officers was made under the direct supervision and care of the Secretary himself. The men in the ranks constituted as fine a body of men as were ever mustered under any flag, but the high character of the service rendered by these regiments must be credited to the care given to the selection of the officers who organized and led them to battle. It would be fortunate, indeed, for the country if the experience obtained through these Philippine volunteers could be made practically available for the volunteer army in time of war. But it is quite useless to expect this; for it is not likely that Congress will enact, in the near future, any legislation which would bring volunteer armies into service without leaving the appointment of the officers, generally, to the Governors of the States. Our wars have all been fought, so far as the military organization is concerned, on the principle that our States constitute a confederacy of independent governments, and not one nation for war purposes, although the method of raising troops and appointing officers by one responsible central authority was once authorized by the Continental Congress, which adopted the following resolution:

**"Having perfect reliance on the wisdom, vigor and uprightness of General Washington do hereby:**

**"Resolve, That General Washington shall be and he is hereby vested with full, ample and complete powers to raise and collect together in**

the most speedy and effectual manner from any or all of these United States, sixteen battalions of infantry in addition to those already voted by Congress; to appoint officers for the said battalions of infantry; to raise, officer and equip three thousand light horse, three regiments of artillery and a corps of engineers and to establish their pay; to apply to any of the States for such aid of the militia as he shall judge necessary; to form such magazines of provisions and in such places as he shall think proper; to displace and appoint all officers under the rank of Brigadier-General and to fill up the vacancies in every other department in the American army; to take, wherever he may be, whatever he may want for the use of the army."

About the time the insurrection in the Philippines had been put down and matters were generally assuming a more peaceful attitude throughout those islands, the Boxer Insurrection took place in China; the manner in which the American policy was carried to a conclusion in the relief of the Embassies in Peking and the subsequent occupation of that city by the allied armies, reflects the highest honor upon the American nation. To no individual was more credit due for this achievement, so far as the diplomatic and military policy is concerned, than to the Secretary of War.

The inauguration of civil government in Porto Rico and the installation of a civil government in the Philippine Islands, before peace had become finally assured amongst all the widely dispersed tribes, illustrate in a marked degree the foresight and wisdom of Secretary Root. The efficiency of the military government of Cuba was due in no small degree to the practised mind and guiding hand of the Secretary of War. All of these events have passed into history, and its verdict will doubtless give credit where credit is due.

With the cessation of general hostilities in the Philippines, the continuance of volunteers in the service was regarded as no longer desirable from a military point of view. The urgent need of a large force in the Philippines made it imperative, however, that the garrison should not be immediately reduced. These circumstances, together with the imperfect condition of our sea-coast defences, necessitated a reorganization of the regular army. Secretary Root devoted himself with painstaking care to all the details connected with this reorganization. The army has never had, in all its history, so perfect an organization as was secured for it at this time. The Secretary had become convinced that several modifications of our military system should be introduced.

Some of his recommendations encountered much opposition; this statement refers specially to the detail system adopted for the staff departments, and a proposition to cause one-third of the promotions in the army to be made by selection and not by seniority. Although its existence was not known to the Secretary, it may not be inappropriate to quote here a recommendation made by Secretary of War John B. Floyd in 1857:

"Attention has been repeatedly called to defects in the organization of the army, and to various details in reference to several of its parts. As these evils increase with time and practice under them, I must again bring them before you.

"The basis of our existing system is the British army as it served in the colonies before the Revolution, retaining many of the defects, since corrected in Great Britain, under the experience and necessities of long wars. Provisions inconsistent with the existing system, copied from other nations, and partial legislation designed for particular interests, have augmented these evils; and we have committed the fault of adapting our fundamental organization to a time of peace, instead of basing it on the exigencies of war.

"One of the greatest errors of detail is the separate, independent character of our staff corps. This removes them from their proper position as aids or assistants to the commander, and constitutes them his equals. It contracts the sphere of observation, and experience, and thus unfits the officer for change or advancement, and begets an accumulation of precedent and prerogative at war with the vital principle of military organization—the inviolable and undivided authority of the head. He is bound, as they are, by the law, and his construction of it should govern them, not theirs him.

"We have retained another fault, abandoned, at least practically, in almost every service among civilized nations, even the most aristocratic and monarchical. This is promotion by seniority. Age and experience should bring excellence; but the test lies in the actual possession of the latter, and not merely in the circumstances which, it is assumed, should produce it. Seniority, with the requirements essential for position, ought certainly to give precedence; but, without these, that dignity and respect which belong to rank and command can never be secured.

"All that has been urged in favor of retaining it with us is the danger of political or personal favor governing a selection. There may be danger from this source; but, by the rule of seniority, the worst officer of any army must, if he lives, come to be one of the most important and responsible officers under the government—the colonel of a regiment. By selection, it is possible that the very best may not always be chosen, though the chances are in favor of this hypothesis; but, certainly, the very worst never will be, and this is surely a gain on the present rule.

"A general provision dispensing with the staff bureaus and giving the President authority to regulate the duties on the principles above

stated, and to transfer, when necessary, officers to and from the line and staff, would restore the institution to its proper effectiveness. Thus, the staff near the War Department, representing the authority of the constitutional commander-in-chief of the army and navy, would bear the same relation to him as the staff attached to a corps in the field have to the colonel or general who commands it.

"Promotion may be a reward of merit and an incentive to zeal by enactment that it shall take place by seniority in corps (unless in extraordinary cases) to the rank of captain, and beyond that by selection from the next grade in the same arm to that to be filled as far as colonel, inclusive. General officers to be at the choice of the President as they now are."

In undertaking the reorganization of the army, its past history was studied with a view to perfecting the organization of its various parts. The three-battalion organization for the infantry had long been recommended by all the higher officers of the army. Service in the war with Spain, during the insurrection in the Philippines, and in China, had shown conclusively the urgent need of battalion staff officers and non-commissioned staff officers. The need of making special provision for bands, instead of deducting their strength from the companies in each regiment, had long been apparent. The abandonment of the regimental system in the artillery, and the substitution of a corps of artillery which could manage harbor defence, including submarine mines and torpedoes, as a unit under one distinct command, rather than under a number of post commanders reporting only to the Department Commander, who might be a thousand miles distant, was regarded as a modern necessity. The success which has attended the establishment of the corps of artillery is ample justification for the changes made. The field-artillery, which in its duties is entirely separate and distinct from the coast artillery, was retained as a part of the corps of artillery, so that the officers would be in line of promotion to the higher grades.

The proportion of field-artillery adopted by the Secretary of War was much larger than had heretofore existed in time of peace in the regular army, but it was based, as was the increase in the number of cavalry regiments, upon the war needs of the country. It was made apparent by much evidence that the various States are unwilling, and many of them unable, to bear the large expense of keeping up organizations of cavalry and field-artillery, in strength proportionate to the infantry organizations of the

National Guard. It was wisely decided, therefore, that the expense incident to keeping up these special arms should be borne by the general Government, at least to a sufficient extent to guarantee a proper proportion in the first line in the event of war. The recorded experience of the Civil War was used to show the extravagance of depending upon new organizations of cavalry and mounted infantry regiments.

Many things desired by the Secretary in connection with the reorganization of the army had to be laid aside for the present. It was recognized that there were so many different interests at stake in the army, that it was advisable first to make the effort for the establishment of a General Staff Corps, which would represent the whole service, and whose recommendations regarding any situation would merit and receive approval at the hands of Congress.

After securing the reorganization of the army, so far as legislation was concerned, Secretary Root realized that a great responsibility rested upon him in the appointment of officers. It is impossible for the President and the Secretary of War to become personally acquainted with even a small percentage of those whom they are called upon to install in office; they are, therefore, quite dependent upon the recommendations of superior officers and members of Congress. Much has been written of an intemperate character regarding the use of political influence in securing military commissions. The general rule adopted by the Secretary was one with which no fault could possibly be found; for it was quite in accord with the recommendations of Washington, Knox and Hamilton, when, in 1798, they were constituted a board to review the relative claims for appointment and precedence of those gentlemen who desired to enter service in the then expected war with France. This rule recognized that, whenever an applicant had prior service in the army or navy, the character which he had established for himself with his superior officers should guide in his selection; if he had no prior service, then the recommendations of the Senators, Members of Congress and citizens of established character within his district or State were regarded as a proper means of establishing his fitness for consideration. This is an eminently proper and legitimate course; for, in all fairness, if a young man has grown up in a community without having established a character with good citizens and pub-

lic officials representing that community, he has no right to complain that he is not selected for office.

Following the general reorganization of the army, the Secretary of War caused to be prepared a bill having for its object the consolidation of the Quartermaster, Subsistence and Pay Departments into one Department of Supply. In this bill a provision was made to create a separate division of transportation, and to place a Major-General at the head of the Supply Department to control the whole. It proved impossible to harmonize the opinions and recommendations of the various parties at interest; and the bill, together with that for the establishment of the General Staff Corps, failed to pass.

During the short session in the winter of 1902-03, a simple bill was devised to establish a General Staff Corps, the usefulness of which would depend entirely upon the manner of its control. It was recognized by the Secretary that there would be no advantage, in the administration of military affairs, in introducing a new Staff Corps so long as the Commanding-General of the Army was retained in his anomalous position; for all the recommendations and work of the General Staff Corps under those conditions could be nullified, and the administration of the army might be embroiled in constantly recurring disagreements between the Secretary of War and the Commanding-General of the Army. The only practicable way of meeting the issue was to recommend to Congress, fairly and frankly, that the continuance of then existing conditions in the command and control of the army was inimical to the welfare of the country. The scheme presented secured the practical elimination of the office of Commanding-General of the Army, and established in its stead the Chief of Staff, who acts for the Secretary of War and not by virtue of being assigned to command. This arrangement was not the result of caprice, experiment or mere desire for change, but it was suggested by the recorded experience of the war with Spain and of the Civil War, which latter has furnished America more military lessons than have been obtained from any other armed conflict since the downfall of Napoleon. No officer can read the recorded hearings of the Secretary of War on this subject before the military committees, during the session of 1902-03, without coming to the conclusion that the modification of our military system was justified by every military and business consideration.



Coincidentally with the efforts for the passage of the General Staff Bill, Congress was urged to place upon the statute-books a law to govern the organized militia, and relieve it from the archaic legal enactments under which it had struggled for a century. The bill which was presented to the National Guard Association, and introduced in Congress with little or no modification, was actually prepared by the Secretary of War himself; the bill as passed contained many modifications and compromises. The Secretary of War has at all times recognized, not only the desirability, but the absolute necessity, of establishing the organized militia of the country upon a practical working basis, and of bringing the regular army into harmony with the great body of citizen soldiery upon whom the country must depend in any great conflict.

Secretary Root has laid the foundation for a state of preparedness for war on the part of the United States which has hitherto been unknown; it will remain for his successors in office to continue the great work which he has so thoroughly inaugurated, and to build upon the foundation so wisely laid during the past few years of active field and administrative experiences. They will find, upon taking up any one of the manifold subjects handled by Secretary Root with so much wisdom and success, that his action has been based upon a painstaking, careful and broad-minded study of all the conditions past and present, and that no matter connected with the administration of the army, or with the development of the organized militia, has seemed to him too small to be considered if it appeared necessary to a full comprehension of the subject. The army must be congratulated upon having had the patriotic, unselfish and devoted services of Elihu Root during four years, covering a period of new development unparalleled in our history. Questions involving political policy, military movements and economic supremacy have all been handled by this master mind as constituting imperceptibly merging elements of successful governmental administration.

At a dinner recently given by the General Staff to the Secretary of War, on the eve of his departure for England as a member of the Alaska tribunal, in recognition of his distinguished and able services, a member of the Cabinet told of a proposition which had been made to Secretary Root, by powerful members of the National Committee, that his name be placed upon the Republican ticket with that of President McKinley. It was stated as

more than probable that, had he authorized the use of his name, he would to-day be President of the United States. The correspondence in this matter should not be lost to history. Through the courtesy of the Postmaster-General, the letters are now made public:

"December 21, 1899.

"MY DEAR MR. PAYNE:

"I have been talking over the situation in the War Department with the President, and particularly the very delicate condition of affairs which will continue for a considerable period in Cuba and the Philippines; and we both agree that it is far more important to the administration, the Republican party and the country, that I should stay here and attend to the business that I have commenced, than that I should be a candidate for Vice-President. It is not that there are not plenty of other men who could take care of the situation here, but it is that I have spent five or six months in becoming familiar with the subject, and no other man can step in and take it up without going through the same training.

"It is like a case which is actually on trial, and the proposition to take out the counsel who is trying it and put in a new man who has never heard of the case before. Of course, being a candidate for Vice-President means not merely a withdrawal from the War Department on the 4th of March, 1901, but it means practical withdrawal from attention to its duties within a very few months, when the activities of the campaign begin.

"I feel this explanation of the situation ought to be made to you, in view of your very kind expressions to me when you were last in Washington.

"Faithfully yours,

"ELIHU ROOT."

"Hon. Henry C. Payne,

"Milwaukee, Wis.

"Milwaukee, Wis., Dec. 26, 1899.

"MY DEAR MR. ROOT:

"I find yours of the 21st inst., on my return home. Your statement of the situation, so far as your relations to the administration and the duties which you are now performing in connection therewith are concerned, appeals to my judgment as proper and right, and I am constrained to say that, under the circumstances, you are entirely justified in your conclusions.

"As I may possibly be responsible somewhat for the use of your name in connection with the office of Vice-President, I shall be only too glad to put you right before the country on the lines of your letter under reply. Or, what might be better, if you think I can be of service to you in that direction, you could write me a letter which I might cause to be published from here, which I think would strengthen you with the good

people of the country; or, if you do not care to write such a letter, I shall be pleased to make any statement regarding the matter which you may think it wise for me to publish.

"I have found no reason to change my opinion of the situation so far as the sentiment of the Republicans of the country obtains toward yourself.

"Very sincerely yours,

"H. C. PAYNE."

"Hon. Elihu Root,

"Washington, D. C.

"January 8, 1900.

"MY DEAR MR. PAYNE:

"I thank you for your very kind letter of December 26th, which I have delayed answering because I wanted to think the subject over a little.

"I think, on the whole, it would not be wise for me to write any letter for publication about the Vice-Presidency. The whole matter has, so far as I am concerned, been to such an extent personal and informal, that any form of treatment of it by me might seem like declining something which the people of the country generally did not consider to have been offered. I should, however, be glad if you will say to the Republicans in your part of the country, who may be interested in this subject, that I am not to be a candidate for Vice-President, and state to them the grounds upon which the conclusion has been reached.

"I need not say that I shall always remember your kindness and confidence.

"Faithfully yours,

"ELIHU ROOT."

"Hon. Henry C. Payne,

"451 Broadway, Milwaukee, Wis.

The more recent service of Elihu Root, as a member of the Commission which sat in London to discuss the Alaska Boundary question, is well known to the entire world. Only those who have been connected with the public service in Alaska, and with the great administrative Departments in Washington, appreciate the many difficulties of the Alaska situation, as it has existed for the past six years. The country is to be sincerely congratulated upon having had such representation on the Alaska Commission as to secure full recognition of the American case. The evil results which would have followed a failure to reach a decision, and, above all things, a decision favorable to the American claims, are more far-reaching than can be well understood by the average citizen of the country at large; endless bickerings, increase of garrisons, fortifications, and a general air of hostilities through-

out Alaska would have undoubtedly followed a failure to reach a just and definite decision.

This sketch cannot be more fittingly closed than with some excerpts from the remarks of the Secretary at the General Staff dinner, which will find responsive chords in the hearts of the army that has felt content to serve in all the distant spheres of action to which it has been called, because of its faith in Elihu Root, the gentleman, scholar and wise administrator:

"I thank you much more—more than words can express—for the kindly consideration which received me, a perfectly green and un-instructed civilian, to the position of Secretary of War, and which has accompanied me with ever-increasing friendship and noble loyalty through the four years of my service. Sailing on Friday next for England, to endeavor to aid in doing away with one of the questions most pregnant with possibilities of conflict between our country and Great Britain,—the Alaskan boundary controversy,—I shall take with me only the pleasantest memories, and shall look forward with agreeable anticipations to the time when I may return to find you all at your work again. I think that, if we all do our duty, if we are all true to the high standard of purpose which, I believe, controls the guiding minds of the American army to-day, the soldiers of the future and generations of American citizens in years to come will look back upon this day, the day of the inauguration of the General Staff of the Army, as a happy day in our military history. This is a time of organization. Great results are produced only by that. Individual effort, individual brilliancy, individual heroism, accomplishes but little, except as it has an effect upon masses of men. Effective and harmonious organization is the moving power of the world to-day. We have lagged behind in the army until now; and now, I believe and trust, we take our place in the front rank of the organizations which are to control the effective action of the future. I look back to the cabals and dissensions which came so near wrecking the effort for independence in Washington's time; the bitterness of heart under which he labored in his long and painful effort to control the discordant elements that were working, or pretending to work, for the independence of the colonies. I look back at the political ambitions which dictated the movements under differing and antagonistic officers during the Mexican War. I recall the bitter controversies which left their echoes sounding through a generation after the close of the Civil War; and, remembering that the most vital defect of a military service is lack of harmony among the officers in command, I look at the unselfish devotion of the last few years, and the last year especially, in the American army with a feeling of pride and satisfaction. When I think of the present Lieutenant-General thrusting aside the leisure and the quiet dignity which he had so well earned, and taking upon himself, in the last year of his active service, the arduous and the perplexing and

annoying duties involved in the presidency of the War College Board and the work of the Chief of Staff; when I reflect upon the disinterested and unselfish course of the Adjutant-General of the Army, who practically occupied the position of Chief of Staff to the President throughout the war with Spain, who wielded a greater power in the control of the American army than any soldier of his day, and who put the whole force and weight of his great influence and his intimate knowledge of the army and of the legislative branch of our government at the service of this new movement which was to put over him a Chief to exercise the power that he had exercised, and who cheerfully and with self-devotion took the position as Assistant to the Chief of Staff where he had been practically Chief; when I look at the heads of the great administrative departments who have been practically independent for so many years, responsible only to the Secretary of War, and acting upon his direction given in reliance upon their advice, and see them voluntarily and cheerfully, and with no thought but of the country's good and the efficiency of the army as a whole, bringing their departments under the direction of a military officer who would stand between them and the Secretary of War; when I see such spirit and patriotism in all the departments and such *esprit de corps* in the army as a whole, it seems to me that I am justified in the most brilliant anticipations and in the most confident expectations for the future of the American army. Other wars are to come; when, we know not; or with whom, we know not; but we know they are to come. Days of trial for our country are to come, and I confidently believe that, when those days are upon us, the American people will look back to the inauguration of the General Staff, and will look back to the inauguration of a good spirit of brotherhood in arms pervading all branches of the American army, as the beginning of a new day and the origin of an efficiency never known before in the defenders of our government and of our nation. I know that I shall not only look upon your work with confidence and trust, but I shall look back with gratitude and affection to all of you who have, with such faith and zeal and loyalty, wrought in the cause which has been so dear to me; for, knowing little of the army, knowing little of military affairs, I believe that I can claim whatever commendation is due for having been myself loyal to the best interests of the army of the United States. I believe that I have had no other sentiment and no desire but an army noble and true, effective and strong, worthy of the great country which relies upon it for defence, worthy of the great and noble men who have adorned its history, and worthy of the great trust which is imposed upon it. I firmly believe that you are all that; that the army which you are to train in the future will be all that; and I expect always to look back upon these happy days of effort and achievement with constant and kindly remembrance and affection."

WILLIAM H. CARTER.